

Vermont PBS
Local Content & Service Report, 2020
Programming and Activities to Benefit Vermonters

(7/2/19 through 6/30/20)

All of us at Vermont PBS continue to find joy and enrichment in the stories we bring to our viewing audience and our efforts to celebrate our home in Vermont and our place in the wider world. During FY 2020, we continued to explore our steadfast commitment to bringing Vermonters together to discover, discuss and celebrate our shared experiences. We amplified our efforts to reach and enrich our unserved and underserved audiences through a robust community engagement calendar and initiatives that were inclusive both in terms of audience representation and content. Expanded programming, partnerships and activities engaged adults and kids alike on air, online and in communities across our viewing region.

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CONNECTING WITH KIDS & FAMILIES

Ready to Learn - Vermont PBS has a history of partnering with the Champlain Valley Head Start (CVHS) program to help parents of economically disadvantaged circumstances learn and practice ways to engage with their preschool-age children at home in a series of events we call Parents + Preschool. This was our fourth year in partnership with CVHS. All of our in person workshops (2017-2020) and now virtual events (2020) to date have reach 148 families sharing 148 PBS Playtime Pad+ Tablets and 488 new books for home.

In February of 2020, our *1000 Books + VTPBS event* with Champlain Valley Head Start and the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington reached three classrooms of Head Start preschool families, most of whom are New Americans or transient families from our community. We reached 20 families with the help of home-visitors and teachers. At this event we gave away **40 books and 20 tablets**.

The Ready to Learn (RTL) Station Training and Implementation Project Grant allowed Vermont PBS to reconnect with our partners at Champlain Valley Head Start and use the Ready to Learn curriculum in a series of classroom and virtual family events. Late in September 2020, Vermont opened schools and preschools under a hybrid delivery model. This has looked like two in person small group days at school with one remote

learning day from home. Creative planning and an outstanding partnership with Head Start allowed VTPBS to help teachers take the lead and implement the RTL curriculum in meaningful ways in the classroom and virtually with families at home. This hybrid preschool delivery model was new for families and teachers. It was also new for our Parents + Preschool project. We found that the RTL model flexibly allowed us to intentionally support families as we all learned new ways to be “together.” We found that the RTL Science Play and Learn and RTL Cat in the Hat Family and Community products were easy for follow and adapt. The 6 teachers and **46 families** found joy, engagement and shared understanding guiding the 48 preschool children during the first few weeks of school. The PBS Playtime + devices, a part of their RTL kits, have become incredibly important tools to all families.

For this iteration of our Parents +Preschool project with Champlain Valley Head Start, we were granted access to four classrooms in our Winooski neighborhood. Winooski is one of two refugee resettlement communities in Vermont. Our preschool family audience spoke 7 different languages including Arabic, Bhutanese or Nepali, Burmese or Karen, Somali and Swahili. Approximately 9.1% of Chittenden County residents speak a language other than English at home, which is the highest percentage in the state of Vermont. Refugees resettled communities, like Franklin Square neighborhood, in the last five years are from Bhutan, Somalia, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq. The most prevalent languages spoken by these refugees are Bhutanese or Nepali, Somali, Burmese or Karen, Swahili or French, and Arabic. The majority of families that resettle in this area are income eligible for Head Start as they have little or no income. Access to WiFi/technology and quality books at home have been identified as barriers. Family access to written materials, technology and WiFi access were identified and addressed in this Vermont PBS project.

Vermont PBS Online Teacher Workshops - Leading into 2020, Vermont PBS launched a series of online workshops set up to count for teacher professional development hours within our approved Vermont Early Educator Certification system. Our Education Consultant, a media literacy certified instructor, initially created the online workshop “Becoming a Media Mentor” for teachers and families to learn more about developmentally appropriate use of technology for young children. At the peak of pandemic closures in Vermont, this workshop series became wildly popular with Early Educators trying to learn quickly how to provide a quality curriculum to preschoolers within a shifting school delivery model. Our free workshop was one of two local workshops offered and approved online. It was also the only local workshop that focused on technology use and safety. To date, **581 teachers** have accessed our online workshops.

With such a great response, we created two other open online workshops including “Tech Savvy” for PreK-12 educators to enrich media literacy understanding and “Mister

Chris and Friends Head, Hands and Heart of Hybrid Learning” pointing to planning tools that pair digital resources with a traditional social-emotional preschool curriculum.

These workshops have been promoted through our Distance Learning project in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Libraries.

PBS LearningMedia -There are more than 400,000 Standards-based resources for students pairing with offline activities and digital media. We have seen our PBS LearningMedia users increase since April 2020 from 3,174 to **6,076**

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Vermont PBS's At-Home Learning and Distance Learning Project-Vermont PBS is often a sole-source point to access high quality educational and cultural programming. We are available for audiences of all ages to help people learn anywhere and at any time, whether digital or broadcast, we offer three different channels for our viewers including the Main channel, 24/7 Kids, and our Plus channels. Vermont PBS's educational focus pivoted in April 2020 to meet the complex needs of distance learning in our Preschool to Grade 12 community during this transitional COVID-19 period. VTPBS quickly partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education (VTAOE) and more recently the Vermont Department of Libraries to broadcast grade-level specific educational content on three channels accessible to 95% of Vermont households. For the past year, three of these channels have been adapted to meet the needs of Distance Learning in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Libraries during "school" hours reaching **21,000 families and teachers**.

Connecting with Community/VPR Partnership News & Public Affairs- For the second consecutive year, Vermont PBS partnered with Vermont Public Radio to co-create THIS LAND: The Changing Story of Rural Vermont. The project explores the realities and rewards of living in rural Vermont through a statewide poll, news and analysis, a storytelling event and other special programming. Vermont PBS is proud to team up with VPR to combine our professional expertise to give voice to the daily experience of rural Vermonters. Throughout the fall we used the full power of our combined public media to explore the story of contemporary rural life and to spark conversation. Together we seek to explain the issues faced by rural communities and highlight grassroots solutions that show promise for the future.

Elements of the project were made available at thislandvt.org, and included a Rural Life Survey – a statewide poll in which Vermonters rate their quality of life, sense of community, use of health care and the relationship between schools and property taxes. Their responses are compared with national data from other rural Americans. The scientific poll was conducted by Braun Research Inc. under the direction of Rich Clark, professor of political science at Castleton University and the former director of the Castleton Polling Institute. The survey was brought to life at our Rural Stories On Stage event from the geographic center of Vermont, where we heard personal stories from Vermonters who have traveled the walks of rural life, with all its challenges and joys. This live event was recorded and later broadcast again on Vermont and Vermont Public Radio. The recording is available to stream at thislandvt.org. Vermont PBS also produced and broadcast a two-part docu-series, *The Future Of Farming*, featuring visits with two farm families to hear firsthand the serious challenges and innovative opportunities for this signature Vermont industry.

In the Spring of 2020, Vermont PBS again partnered with VPR on the first of three election-year polls, looking at Super Tuesday results. These were shared in full online for the public, as well as in news stories on VPR and in discussion on *Vermont This Week*, Vermont PBS' weekly news analysis program.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Mister Chris & Friends - Mister Chris and Friends has been celebrating childhood since 2017 by creating 12 gently paced episodes and 6 digital educational short clips that reinforce routine. Content to date has focused on self-regulation, embracing accommodations, asking for help, and more. A Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (S.T.E.A.M) thread weaves each story together looking at anything from the life cycle of frogs to the migration of butterflies. Our New England Emmy award-winning episode, "Lost and Found" pairs animal tracks with self-regulation and problem-solving.

Vermont PBS looks ahead to create another inspiring season of Mister Chris and Friends which will include developmentally appropriate approaches to learning about community, equity and cultural traditions. Mister Chris and Friends continues to connect interactive experiences and activities which are included on PBS LearningMedia which reaches 6,076 Vermont Educators.

Mister Chris & Friends Concert Series- Vermont PBS partnered with [Let's Grow Kids](#) and [ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain](#) to bring Mister Chris and Friends in Concert to venues around Vermont, with a focus on the region's underserved rural communities. Tickets for these concerts were offered at \$5, or less, per person to include as many families as possible.

With something for everyone, these performances were designed to engage, entertain, and, true to the mission of Vermont PBS, educate. The band performed new and familiar songs, including favorites from the Emmy-winning Vermont PBS music series for kiddos, *Mister Chris and Friends*.

In addition to the musical performance by the band, Vermont PBS and ECHO, Lahey Center for Lake Champlain provided interactive Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematic (STEM)-focused activities at the concert to create a fully immersive, hands-on afternoon of discovery for the whole family. The four sold-out concerts entertained and engaged 925 parents and children.

Mister Chris & Friends Family Hour - At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we responded to school closures and stay-at-home orders with The Mister Chris and Friends Family Hour. This initiative was created to provide structure during challenging times for young families—a time and a place for families to gather with no agenda. Not about school or work, but a reason to get cozy and spend some quality time together.

The Mister Chris and Friends Family Hour began each Thursday at 6PM with an episode of Mister Chris and Friends on the Vermont PBS Kids Channel (or it could be viewed from the Mister Chris page on our website). After the episode viewers were directed to our Facebook page for a live concert beginning at 6:30PM. During the concert there is interaction with those watching. Mister Chris was the perfect person to provide comfort and bring joy to families during this difficult time, taking requests, greeting kiddos in the audience and engaging with the adults watching by using the chat function. We had over 13,000 views and nearly 5,000 engagements on Facebook during these concerts.

Sunday Best - Vermont PBS partnered with the Vermont International Film Festival (VTIFF) and Main Street Landing Performing Arts Center to share independent films from Independent Lens one Sunday each month. The screenings were followed by conversations with filmmakers and community organizations. In FY20 this film series brought together over 400 attendees.

Live Events - In the summer of 2019, we attended numerous events with the hopes of engaging with families of young children. We visited farmer's markets, the county fair, a local baseball game and other community events to promote PBS Kids and our commitment to young children. With the help of Curious George, Daniel Tiger, Nature Cat and our own Mister Chris we were able to connect with over 800 Vermont families.

-The premiere of Ken Burns' Country Music gave us a reason to gather and celebrate a true American music. Through the Peacham Acoustic Music Festival, a concert with Jamie Thurston, a hometown hero now living in Nashville, and an engaging panel discussion with knowledgeable musicians, we were able to share a preview of this incredible film with over 300 music fans.

-We connected with over 70 fans of Masterpiece and Jane Austin to promote the Masterpiece: Sanditon series at two events featuring period costumes and a British High Tea.

Virtual Events- In May of 2020, after the cancellation of in-person events, we pivoted to online events utilizing the CPB OVEE platform. For our first event we partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education to share a preview of the PBS Kids program *Hero Elementary* to engage with teachers and parents. Following the preview, we hosted a live discussion with the program's co-creator, its education content manager, and the English Language Arts specialist at the Vermont Agency of Education.

In June we hosted author and historian Lucy Worsley from her home in London. We previewed her latest program, *Lucy Worsley's Royal Myth's and Secrets*, and followed it up with a lively interview hosted by a University of Vermont professor of History. The interview currently has over 145,000 views on our YouTube channel.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Social - We have seen a steady increase in followers and engagements on our social media channels – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. This increase is due to sharing a mix of promotional content to drive viewers to watch Vermont PBS and fun, engaging and timely news and information that appeals to our viewers. We are also able to grow our followers through paid advertising or “boosting” of posts.

e-Newsletters - Our newest e-newsletter, *The Lift*, debuted at the start of Q2, with strong initial engagement results that continued to grow through the end of the quarter. We are currently applying some of the processes and metrics developed for it to help us optimize our other e-newsletters. *This Week*, our weekly e-newsletter featuring program and event highlights, and the *Kids News*, a similar monthly highlight for kids and parents, both received major redesigns when we shifted editing platforms and updated to our new branding. These new iterations are much easier to create and are optimized to feature partners (and, pre-COVID, events), and to look great on desktops or mobile devices.

Some Important Facts

- Mister Chris and Friends (MCAF), Vermont's own live-action children's program, in its third year of production features Vermont farmer and educator Chris Dorman. MCAF won a New England Emmy Award this year in the in the Children/Youth category presented by the Boston/New England Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.
- Vermont teachers, homeschoolers and students have free access to more than 400,000 curriculum-aligned digital resources through PBS Learning Media. More than **21,000** families and teachers have visited our At-Home Learning and Distance Learning page where we shifted broadcast and resource in rapid response to meet home, school, hybrid and remote learning needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As Vermont's visual storyteller, all of us at Vermont PBS will continue to amplify our community engagement activities and deepen our presence in and around the region in an effort to live into our mission to "connect neighbors through stories that change lives."